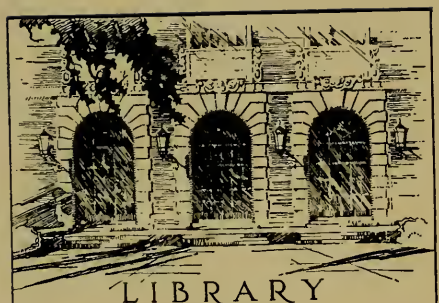

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WHO ARE THE FRIENDS OF THE FARMER?

A SPEECH BY MR. JACOB WILSON

(MEMBER OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE, MEMBER OF COUNCIL OF THE ROYAL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY OF ENGLAND, ETC.)

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WHO ARE THE FRIENDS OF THE FARMER?

Mr. Jacob Wilson, in response to the toast of "The Agricultural Interest," at a dinner held to celebrate the return of the Hon. Guy Dawnay for the North Riding, expressed his thanks for the compliment of having his name associated with so important and comprehensive a toast, and proceeded as follows: I have no reason to doubt that the recent election in this division was fought out otherwise than on the broad lines of Conservatism and Liberalism, though at one time I confess that this normal arrangement appeared likely to be upset by a novel electioneering element of a most disturbing and revolutionary character. You will readily perceive that I allude to

THE FARMERS' ALLIANCE,

an organisation which, in piscatorial language, may be described as a most alluring bait, which, in the hands of an astute angler like Mr. Gladstone, may be employed with the most deadly results. This bait was designed in Dublin, manufactured in Birmingham, and introduced to the public on the banks of the Thames. In clear water, with a cloudless sky, and a bright sun, no angler of experience would ever dream of attempting to fish with such tackle, for he must well know that even the youngest and most inexperienced "fry," would at once detect the Brummagem tinsel, and thus discover its artificial, hollow, and unreal composition, and would have none of it. But when the waters are disturbed by some exciting cause, when the sky is clouded, and the sun obscured, then the wily angler knows that his opportunity has arrived, and he dexterously drops the bait into a likely pool, where the younger fry rush at it open-mouthed, and swallow it without consideration to their ultimate destruction. Others also at first eagerly rise at it, but on reflection some of the more cautious repent in time and disgorge it; whilst the older and more experienced pass it by as something to be avoided. Now, gentlemen, in a company like the present, you will, I know, readily be able to apply this simile to the agricultural position, for when agriculture is prosperous, and when our seed times and harvests come and go with regularity, then Mr. Gladstone and his followers well know that it would be useless to attempt to make political capital out of the agricultural interest. But when, on the other hand, agriculture is suffering, as it is at present, from a series of bad harvests, unfavourable seasons, and an unwarrantable number of diseases among our flocks and herds, all combining, unfortunately, to produce

a very natural condition of dissatisfaction, ruin, and dismay throughout the agricultural classes in this country, then the Radical party and the Farmers' Alliance see their opportunity of making capital out of the situation, and immediately drop their unsavoury bait in front of the unfortunate farmer in the hope of distracting his attention and tempting him from his former allegiance by destroying those ties of affinity which have for generations bound together the landlords and tenants. I am frequently asked what the Farmers' Alliance really is?

WHAT IS ITS CONSTITUTION AND WHAT ARE ITS OBJECTS?

I cannot attempt to explain its composition otherwise than by describing to you who and what are the leaders and officials of this organisation. As far, therefore, as I can gather, it consists of a president, two vice-presidents, a secretary, and, I presume, a council or committee, but for all practical purposes the president, the vice-presidents, and the secretary form the recognised executive. The president is Mr. James Howard, the member for Bedfordshire, and a partner in a very large firm of implement makers, who have amassed a considerable fortune from this business, naturally and in a great measure out of the pockets of the British farmer. The vice-president (at least the one who is best known and most active in this work) is Mr. Barclay, the member for Forfarshire, who is, I am told, a manufacturer of artificial manures, and has made a considerable fortune, I presume, out of the pockets of the Scotch farmers. I will not refer to the antecedents of the secretary beyond saying that I believe he was formerly the editor of a Radical London newspaper, which has the good fortune to be now regarded as the organ of the Farmers' Alliance. The only other member of this self-constituted Salvation Army whom I know is also a large and influential agricultural implement maker. Now I do not for a moment desire to refer to the private occupation or business of any of these gentlemen in an offensive manner, but my object in doing so at all is to point out to you the entire absence of the tenant-farmer element from the posts of responsibility or management of this body. The programme of the Alliance contains much that is useful and of which I entirely approve; but I share the opinion of the boy regarding the powder in the spoonful of jam, that the jam contains much that is exceedingly distasteful. The most important feature in the programme of the Alliance is that the managers of that body profess to see that the farmers of England shall be better represented in Parliament. They also profess to be a non-political body, always considering agriculture first and politics afterwards; but if this be so, how do they reconcile this statement with the fact that all the leaders and officials mentioned above are extreme Radicals? It is true, I believe, that one of the vice-presidents—a Mr. Parsons—is

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a so-called Conservative, but from the small share he takes in matters affecting the Alliance it is generally supposed that he is simply thrown in for appearance sake. And how is it also that the Farmers' Alliance is clearly responsible for having turned my friend Mr. Clare Sewell Read out of the House of Commons? and let me say that no more able and independent representative of the tenant-farmers' interest ever sat in that House. The only reply possible is, because he is a Conservative. Then, again, why does this agricultural caucus never support any but Radical candidates? Do you think they would ever have dreamt of supporting men like my friend Mr. Outhwaite unless he had been willing to swallow the Alliance Pill, which would have made him essentially a Radical? No, gentlemen, the more you inquire into it and watch its proceedings, the more apparent it becomes that the professions and the performances of the Farmers' Alliance do not harmonise. It is an organisation, however, the importance of which must not be ignored. I sincerely believe it to be most dangerous, mischievous, and insidious in its character. It had evidently been well considered and thought out in all its bearings by its promoters before they launched it on the public. I believe it to be far-reaching and widely comprehensive in its objects. It embraces the aspirations of the Irish Home Ruler by practically granting fixity of tenure without requiring an equivalent from one party or granting compensation to the other, which is nothing less than robbery and confiscation; whilst it, at the same time, plays into the hands of the Manchester and Birmingham schools, whose objects have ever been to destroy the bulwarks and undermine the foundation upon which the agricultural interests of this country have stood and flourished for generations past. The line of action of the Farmers' Alliance is, first to create a feud between landlord and tenant; but it will not stop here, for its next move will be to set the labourer against his employer, and having succeeded in producing this chaotic condition of things it expects to swamp the political influence of the agricultural interest and turn it in its own favour. It will be a sorry day for England when the three great interests—landlord, tenant, and labourer—become separated, for from that day will date the downfall of British agriculture. Is not, therefore, the action of the Radical party, through this instrument in their hands—the Farmers' Alliance—most unpatriotic, at a moment especially when the best endeavours of all right-minded men ought to be directed towards cementing more closely and firmly the bonds that unite the interests of landlord and tenant, and thus enabling them together to tide over this serious period of unparalleled depression, instead of turning it to their own selfish and political advantage? I see in the daily action of the present Government how closely allied it is with the Farmers' Alliance, which is a powerful lever in the

hands of Mr. Gladstone, whenever he thinks fit to make use of it, for electioneering purposes, as he did in the recent election in this division. I am fortified in this opinion by the following occurrence in the House of Commons. It may be in your recollection that about the close of last Session a question was asked of the Prime Minister by the Chairman of the Farmers' Alliance, in his capacity of member for Bedfordshire, as to the probability or intention of the Government to bring in a Land Bill during the present Session. The reply of Mr. Gladstone was both remarkable and suggestive, for he told Mr. Howard that their action in the matter must depend upon two points: First, whether the farmers desired to have a Land Bill at all, and, secondly, with what force and power they expressed that desire. Well, gentlemen, when I read this question and reply, their pre-arrangement appeared beyond a doubt, whilst never was a more glaring invitation for agitation thrown out to the farmers of this country. We had not long to wait in order to see its effects, for during the autumn we began to read of meetings of farmers taking place in the far north—in Aberdeenshire, Morayshire, and Forfarshire—delegates were sent down from the Farmers' Alliance, branches of the Alliance were formed, whilst the spark that had been lighted in the north spread with the rapidity of a rocket through the length and breadth of Scotland, touching county after county till it at last crossed the border; and having expended its force on the banks of the Tees, it went off in a grand display of fireworks to the admiration and wonder of the Quaker inhabitants of Darlington. Now, gentlemen, I have endeavoured to give you some idea of the acts and deeds of the Farmers' Alliance out of doors, where it is anxious to appear as the farmers' friend; but let me ask you for a moment to consider the action and behaviour of the leaders and representatives of the Alliance in the House of Commons. I will give you one or two illustrations. In March of last year the honourable member for Mid-Lincolnshire, Mr. Chaplin—than whom no more consistent supporter or able exponent of the tenant-farmers' interests sits in the House of Commons—brought forward a motion, calling attention to the serious outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease all over the country. He showed that by the action of

THE CONTAGIOUS DISEASES (ANIMALS) ACT,

introduced by the Duke of Richmond, the late Government had succeeded in stamping out that disease entirely, and for nine months before the late Government left office there had not been a single case of disease, and, in fact, the country was perfectly free. Within a very short time after the Liberal Government came in three cargoes of diseased animals were admitted into Deptford, and within two or three days afterwards foot-and-mouth disease appeared in the

London dairies, and from there spread rapidly all over the country. Mr. Chaplin, therefore, asked by his motion that no animals from countries where that disease was known to exist at the time should be permitted to land in this country under any circumstances whatever. To this motion, Mr. James Howard, the Chairman of the Farmers' Alliance, and his supporters in the House belonging to the Alliance, offered their most strenuous opposition. But in spite of this opposition on the part of the Farmers' Alliance and the Government combined, Mr. Chaplin's motion was only defeated by a small majority, whereas if it had received the support of the Farmers' Alliance instead of their opposition there is no doubt it would have been carried, and the country rendered free from any further risk of imported diseases. To show you the importance of this subject, however, I may mention that since March last no fewer than 78 cargoes of diseased animals have been imported into this country, so that we need not be much surprised at the frequent outbreaks of which we read. Allow me to give you one further illustration. Mr. Chaplin's

was read a second time unanimously in 1881, and although Mr. James Howard opposed it on the second reading, he withdrew his motion, and it was passed by the unanimous consent of both sides of the House. Not being able, however, to carry it through its later stages, owing to the great pressure of Irish and other business, Mr. Chaplin re-introduced it this Session. Mr. James Howard, although he dared not divide against it last Session, immediately blocked it, in the hope of stopping even its introduction. It is due, however, to Mr. Howard to say that on the following day he apologised and expressed his regret to Mr. Chaplin, saying that he had done it in a fit of temper and vexation in consequence of his own Bill having been objected to by another member. Mr. Howard, I believe, also offered to take it off, but too late, as his blocking motion was on the paper of that day, and as Mr. Chaplin's Bill could not be taken after half-past twelve o'clock by the rules of the House, consequently unless it was reached before that hour he would have been deprived of all chance of proceeding with the Bill during the present Session. By a miracle of good luck, however, the debate on the Irish question came to an end at half-past eleven, and as Mr Chaplin's Bill stood seventh or eighth on the list he was enabled to introduce it, and I am glad to say he has secured the 14th of June as the day for its second reading. It is to be hoped that if the leaders of the Farmers' Alliance in the House of Commons wish to persevere in their opposition to this and other Bills applying to agriculture, they will adopt some other course of procedure than the unusual one to which I have alluded. Again there

was a Bill in the session of 1881, brought in by Sir Henry Holland, Mr. Rodwell, and Mr. Cropper, for the purpose of exempting machinery hired or borrowed by a farmer, and all stock agisted upon the farm, from the operation of

THE LAW OF DISTRESS.

The Bill was universally approved, the agricultural journals were in its favour, and there was no opposition except by Mr. Barclay, the Vice-President of the Alliance. It passed the second reading after a short discussion, and he then blocked it, and, in spite of Sir H. Holland and Mr. Rodwell watching night after night, succeeded in his obstruction. In fact, the policy of all the Alliance men has been to stop the progress of any measure for the relief of agriculture which did not originate from themselves. Gentlemen, I have endeavoured, however inadequately, to lay before you the manner in which the Farmers' Alliance proceeds in its public duty both in and out of the House of Commons, and I leave it for you to say whether you desire your interests as agriculturists to be represented in such a manner. I venture to think that I may have satisfied you as to how far this organisation is non-political in its action, and to what extent its profession of being agricultural first and political afterwards is justified by facts. Another prominent subject in the programme of the Farmers Alliance is the total abolition of the Law of Distress, which formed a leading feature of discussion on both sides during the recent election. Standing as I do before you, gentlemen, this evening, in the varied capacity of a landlord, a representative of considerable estates, and a tenant-farmer, I feel that I may be permitted to make a few remarks upon this subject. Well then, gentlemen, I may start by saying that, from a landlord's point of view, I look upon this matter with comparative indifference, because I am aware that in letting his land the landlord can, in the event of the repeal of the Law of Distress, make such special arrangements as will secure him from loss of rent, though I believe these safeguards will be of a much more onerous nature than at present exist towards the tenant. But from the standpoint of a tenant-farmer, I regard this question far otherwise. I maintain that it is essentially a tenant's question, and especially a " small " tenant's question. The abolition or repeal of this law would entail a levelling down of all classes. The tenant of 200 acres would have to level himself down to 100 acres, while the occupier of 100 acres must revert to the position of a farm labourer, and there he must remain. This of itself would, in my eyes, be a national misfortune, for in my own county I could point to hundreds of men who, by industry, thrift, and integrity, and by the protection afforded by this law, have risen from the position of shepherds and labourers to become considerable farmers, and to occupy influential positions in the agricultural

world. I understand the Law of Distress to be one of the incidents of the Law of Real Property. Land has been bought and sold for all time subject to this law as part of the bargain, and for which money consideration has been given, and it has thus become part of the security for which the purchaser has paid his money, upon which the mortgagee has arranged his loan, and upon which rent charges have been created. Any ruthless interference, therefore, with this law, to the extent of a total repeal, would be equivalent to an unjustifiable detraction from the value of property. We are told by those who advocate the abolition of this law that it would be to the tenant's advantage by placing all creditors on an equal footing with the landlord, that it would add to his independence, and enable him to procure greater facilities from his banker by having better security to offer him. Gentlemen, there is probably not a man in this room who has not, during some period of his life, been in some measure indebted to his banker for monetary assistance. Bankers are, as a body, a very estimable class of men ready to grant you accommodation, but upon two conditions: first, that you must furnish them with ample security, and, secondly, that you must pay for the privilege you are receiving. Now I would like to ask gentlemen this evening, if there is not another body of men who are equally accommodating, especially in times of depression like the present, I refer to the landlords. Have you the smallest conception at this moment of the amount of money that the landlords have practically lent out to their tenants during the past four or five years in the shape of arrears, remissions, and reductions of rent, aye, even in hard cash, for which they will never ask for a penny as interest, and in a majority of cases will never see their principal again? Gentlemen, this is no imaginary statement; but does it not appear to you unreasonable to deprive the landlord of the partial security he possesses, and that enables him in the hour of need to lend a helping hand to a suffering tenant on more liberal terms than he can expect to receive assistance elsewhere, and, in fact, when he is not in a position to offer any security at all to his bankers? Believe me, gentlemen, you are safer in the hands of your landlords as your bankers than in those of anybody else. And when the history of the present agricultural depression comes to be written—if it ever be written by an unprejudiced pen —the conduct of the landlords of this country in generously coming forward, at the greatest sacrifice to themselves, to share with the tenant-farmer in his misfortunes and losses will deserve to be recorded in letters of gold. But, gentlemen, I do not consider that the tenant-farmers of England are responsible for this outcry against the Law of Distress. It has certainly become an electioneering cry of the Radical party; but it found its origin with the tradesmen, with the agricultural implement makers, artificial manure manufacturers, and other trades connected with agriculture. These traders now ask

to be placed on what they call equal terms with the landlord, whilst during all these years they have been selling their wares subject to the existence of this law and charging a price sufficiently high to cover their risk. What more do they require? Do you for a moment imagine they will be willing to charge the farmer one penny less for their articles if this law were abolished? No, gentlemen; I venture to think that if we depend upon such promises or hopes we are trusting to a broken reed. I have pointed out, however, that even if the Law of Distress were abolished, the landlord would be able to make such special arrangements as would secure him against loss. This may be done in various ways, but the most probable plan to be adopted would be what is called "*fore-renting*," which means depriving the tenant of that credit he now possesses. I confess I was much surprised to read during the recent election that the Radical party, who so much desire to be regarded as the farmers' friends, strongly advocated such a course. I cannot conceive that such a recommendation could come from anyone who was not in reality the small farmers' greatest enemy, and such, I venture to think, is your opinion also. But when a desire is expressed that a certain law must be abolished, it becomes our duty to look for some substitute. In this case we must look abroad to find a country in which the Law of Distress does not exist, and I find that Denmark is a country of this character. It appears that in Denmark the landlord protects himself by exacting the payment of a year's rent in advance, and the deposit of certificates for a certain amount of funded property, or, in lieu thereof, the security or guarantee of one or two responsible persons. This statement is corroborated by a letter I hold in my hand from Mr. Westenholz, the Consul-General of Denmark, a gentleman thoroughly conversant with agricultural matters, who in writing to my friend Mr. Jenkins, the secretary of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, used these words: "With regard to distraint for non-payment of rent, I do not believe any law exists in Denmark giving landlords preference over other creditors. Hence the custom of stipulating for prepayment and sufficient securities, as alluded to by you; and the securities, I know, sometimes consist in ready money, deposited with the landlord, upon which he allows the tenant a mere interest of 4 per cent. I am of opinion that the absence of any law of distraint acts against the farmers of my country." Gentlemen, I put it to you whether such an alteration in the Law of Distress, as I have indicated as existing elsewhere, would be to your comfort, convenience, or advantage? But do not misunderstand me with reference to this matter, for, whilst I consider that the total abolition of the Law of Distress would be detrimental to the interests of the tenant-farmer, and especially to the smaller class of farmers, I am free to admit that a modification and alteration of this law is highly desir-

able. I should be prepared to advocate the limitation of its action to one or two years, and I would even go so far as to exempt labourers' wages, seed-corn, and certain defined implements of husbandry, from its operation, in order that—from a national point of view—there should be some guarantee that the land may not remain in an idle or unprofitable condition. Such an arrangement would, to my mind, meet all the requirements of those who consider this question in a practical and agricultural point of view, and who do not regard it from a political and party standpoint. Now, gentlemen, in order to treat this matter with all fairness, pray let me give you the reasons advanced by Mr. James Howard for first starting the Farmers' Alliance. In a letter written to the *Times* on Nov. 15, 1881, he says: "Widespread disappointment was now felt at the neglect of the farming interest by the Government, which had been in power for six years. Great dissatisfaction was, moreover, expressed that instead of remedial measures being introduced, the Government folded its arms and contented itself by proposing a

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY."

Gentlemen, it was quite time that Lord Beaconsfield's Government proposed a Royal Commission, fully alive to the importance of the subject and of the serious condition to which agriculture had been brought by recent disastrous seasons, and anxious to sift the matter to the very root in order to see in what way, if any, legislation could be applied to the relief and benefit of the British farmer. Upon this Commission Mr. Howard's brother sits as one of the most able and independent representatives of the farmers of this country. But if the Commission had done nothing more than furnish an opportunity to the leaders and officials of the Farmers' Alliance to air their crotchets and expose their fallacies, it would deserve the thanks of the farmers of England. The Right Hon. Mr. Dodson also, in a speech at Scarborough, as one of the emissaries sent down by Mr. Gladstone during the recent election, said that it was a mistake to call

THE TORY PARTY THE FARMERS' FRIENDS,

for they were nothing more than a party of promisers and not of performers, and had really done nothing for the farming interest. Gentlemen, do you call it nothing that the Conservative Government should have relieved local taxation to the amount of 2½ millions per annum, whilst in the year 1881 these subventions, the offspring of Conservative legislation, amounted to no less a sum than £2,972,451? Is it nothing that the taxes on agricultural horses and your favourite colley dogs were abolished by them? Is it nothing that the

AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS ACT

was passed into law by the untiring energy of the Duke of Richmond,

who above all living men has a right to be regarded as the greatest benefactor to all classes connected with agriculture? By this Act the presumption of law with regard to improvements in land was changed in favour of the tenant-farmer. I am aware that it has been denounced by our political opponents as "a sham," because of the clause in the Act which enables the landlord or tenant to make an agreement with special conditions which they may consider likely to suit their respective circumstances better than the more general conditions contained in the Act. Let me ask you what great and successful measure of legislation was ever carried in the first instance in a compulsory form, and let me further ask my friend Sir Wilfrid Lawson and his followers wherein is the great difference between local option in liquor and local option in agriculture? From my own personal knowledge, however, I can assure you that this Act—inoperative as our opponents would lead us to believe it to be—has done an immense deal of good to the farming interest of this country, by suggesting to the minds of intelligent and right-minded landlords and land agents the justice and desirability of incorporating conditions in their agreements giving security to their tenants in terms more or less in accordance with those of the Act. It is quite possible that the day may arrive when it will be advisable to make this Act compulsory, and I, for one, should be the last to object to such a course. It should, however, continually be borne in mind that a Conservative Government were the progenitors of the scheme, and that though at the time the Act was passed (mainly by the instrumentality of the Duke of Richmond), it would have been highly impolitic, nay, utterly impracticable, to make such a measure compulsory on either landlord or tenant; yet I think I may say that the minds of both these classes have been educated to see the advantages conferred by the Act. In some cases, perhaps, the Act will be unnecessary, on account of the liberal agreements already in force; but in others—I speak of those in which the tenants are not so favourably situated—it will be highly acceptable and beneficial. One more subject permit me to allude to, as an undoubted benefit conferred upon the agricultural interest by the Conservative Government, and that is the Contagious Diseases (Animals) Act of 1878, better known as

THE CATTLE BILL.

It would, indeed, be a case of gross omission if I neglected referring to this matter in this particular district, for, important though it be, it was not carried without the greatest difficulty, and with the most appalling sacrifice—a sacrifice to you, a sacrifice to me, and a sacrifice to the nation at large, and that is the sacrifice of the valued life of our dear friend Mr. Tom Booth. Gentlemen, if any memorial were desired to his memory, none of a more permanent character could be erected than the successful issue of this important piece of legisla-

tion. It was not carried, however, without the greatest difficulty, and most strenuous opposition from the Radical party, and night after night did Mr. Booth and I watch its course through the House of Commons, opposed at every stage, and by whom? By men like Mr. Chamberlain, Sir Charles Dilke, Mr. Mundella, and last, but not least, by Mr. Barclay, who now poses himself before the country as the farmers' friend. Gentlemen, before I leave this subject let me for a moment allude to an article in a Scotch paper in which the writer went out of his way to call in question the remarks of my friend Mr. John Booth, who in referring to this question during the recent election took occasion to say that the opposition to the Bill was to be found in the Radical camp. The writer to whom I allude said that nobody knew better than Mr. John Booth that this was not the case, that it was not a political question, but one rather between borough and county. Gentlemen, if Mr. Booth required anybody to corroborate his statement I am now here to do so. You want no more convincing proof of the fallacy of this theory than to have pointed out to you that one of the most ardent supporters and promoters of the Bill was Mr. George Elliot, the member for the borough of Northallerton—a fact which redounds to his credit, and is worthy of lasting recollection by the farmers of this district. But you will not now be surprised to hear me repeat that one of the most determined opponents of the Bill was Mr. Barclay, the member for the county of Forfar. Gentlemen, where credit is due there let it be given. Many other matters of legislation might I refer to as having been the work of the Conservative party, but time will not permit me to do so; but in justice to the present Liberal Government I feel I must not ignore what they have done in the way of legislation for the farming interest. Immediately after coming into power in 1880, and in gratitude to the agricultural constituencies that had, to their surprise, placed them in power, they brought in *two* measures which they desired to serve as a sop to the farmer. One of these was the

HARES AND RABBITS BILL,

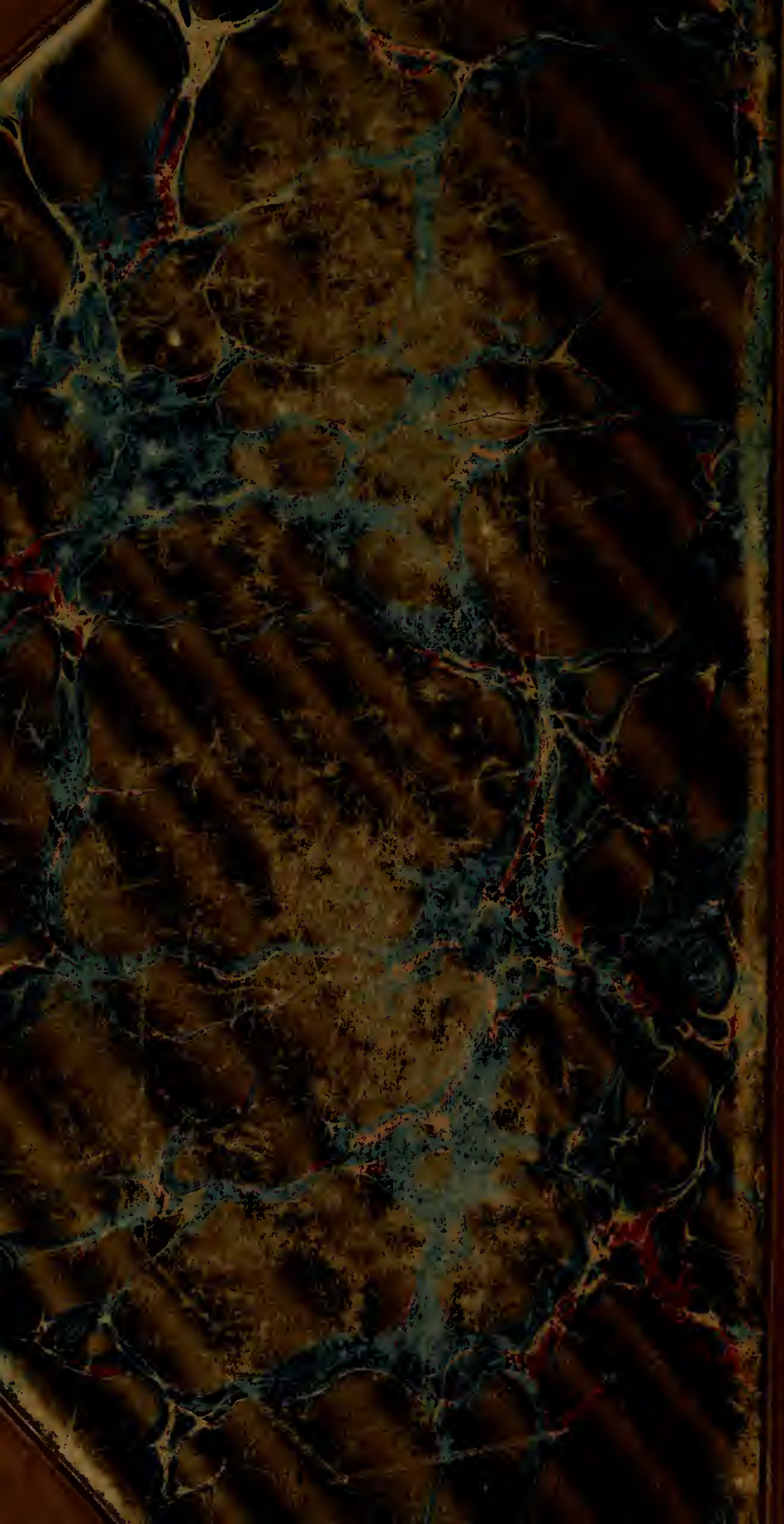
and the other what is generally known as the repeal of the malt tax. I never think of these two subjects without remembering an amusing incident in connection with them. It so happened that I was in the House of Commons on the evening that Mr. Gladstone introduced his Bill for the repeal of the Malt Tax, and on the same night the second reading of the Hares and Rabbits Bill was moved by Sir William Harcourt. I well remember seeing him rise in his place with that arrogant manner so peculiarly his own, and using words somewhat to this effect: "The 10th of June, 1880, will long be remembered by the British farmers as the occasion upon which two Bills were discussed in this House

as likely to confer the greatest blessings upon them." Gentlemen, after being somewhat taken aback by such a sweeping assertion, I turned to my friend near me and said, "I venture to think that the day will come when the British farmers will refer to those two Acts in the simple words of '*Thank you for nothing.*'" Gentlemen, I ask, is not that now your reply? As far as the Hares and Rabbits Bill is concerned, I am bound to admit that I see very little difference in the condition of things; but where any difference does at all exist it is seen in the fact of the farmer having been deprived by this Act of the power to claim compensation for damage done to his crops. Then as to the

REPEAL OF THE MALT TAX,

I do not regard it as a repeal at all. It is simply a substitution of one tax for another, which is no relief, whilst its practical operation is best shown by the patent fact that you and I cannot sell our inferior barley at any price. Now to what is this due? (A Voice: "To the repeal of the Malt Tax.") Yes, sir, that is my opinion also, and I will endeavour to show you why. Mr. Gladstone succeeded in inserting clauses into the Act that practically offered a premium on inferior light foreign barley and other substances to the exclusion of our own home-grown barley. He created a standard of 1,057 degrees as the specific gravity of every two bushels of malt, whilst 42 lbs. weight of malt or corn of any description, or 28 lbs. of sugar, was deemed the equivalent of a bushel of malt. If it fails to come up to the standard, then the extra duty is to be paid on the raw material. French barley, if even only 53 lbs. per bushel, will give a higher standard than our damaged barley, therefore French barley, poorer though it be in appearance, is imported to our detriment. In the years 1872 and 1878 I believe the quality of barley was as inferior as we have it this year; but during those years maltsters and brewers succeeded in converting such barley into malt and beer of various degrees of quality; whilst this year the case is far different, as the maltsters dare not attempt to make use of it for fear of not coming up to the hard and fast standard, and fearing that they may be mulcted in the payment of an extra duty on the raw material. Therefore I feel justified in saying to the present Government, in return for these two wonderful efforts of legislation—"*Thank you for nothing.*" Whether we shall have any further legislation in the direction of relief in the matter of local taxation I know not, but you will observe that Mr. Gladstone has a great dread that if he helps the tenants in this manner, the landlords will get the benefit, and this is exactly what he and his Radical supporters do not want. Far rather would they allow the tenant to continue to suffer than that the landlord should receive any benefit. But enough, gentle-

men, of the past; our attention may more profitably be directed to

THE FUTURE.

I am no alarmist. Permit me to say, that after a most careful consideration of all matters concerned, and after giving due weight to the important question of the importation of farm produce of all kinds from other countries, I have come to the conclusion that we English farmers have nothing to fear for the future of the agriculture of this country. It is quite possible that we may have to change our system of management in many respects in order to keep pace with the altered conditions of the day, but with a re-arrangement of rents, at present taking place on all sides —whether of a permanent or temporary character;—with land relieved of much of the unjust and inequitable taxation imposed upon it;—with a just scale of compensation for unexhausted improvements;—with ample and reasonable security for tenant's capital;—with consistent legislation to prevent the introduction of contagious diseases from foreign countries, and ample safeguards at home, we may yet find the earnest desires of our hearts gratified. To landlords I say, Stick by your old and tried tenants. To tenants I say, Place trust and confidence in your landlords. Permit no side issue or momentary panic to distract your attention or entice you from the political traditions of your ancestors; and, above all, stick to the great Conservative cause of this country, which is naturally so closely identified with and representative of the agricultural interest, and, whilst progressive in its action, will jealously protect and defend the institutions and the bulwarks of our constitution. Then, with a return of fine seasons, which are as sure to recur as day and night alternate, and of which I venture to think the present fine winter is a precursor, we shall once more find farming a prosperous and lucrative occupation, and we shall again live to see the agriculture of our beloved country stand out in bold relief, to the admiration and pride of Englishmen and the wonder and envy of all nations. (Cheers.)